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Conceptualizing Childcare

Early Childhood Education and Care in Post 1945 Britain
Die Neu-Definition von Kinderbetreuung. Institutionelle Früherziehung in Großbritannien nach 1945

Der Artikel gibt einen allgemeinen historischen Überblick über Entstehung und Entwicklung institutioneller Erziehung und Bildung der frühen Kindheit in Großbritannien nach dem 2. Weltkrieg. Sodann geht er auf die Einflüsse ein, die New Labour und der Feminismus im Rahmen ihrer breiteren politischen und ideologischen Programme auf die Förderung des Früherziehungssystems nehmen. Diese Programme – so wird argumentiert – haben in der Vergangenheit dazu geführt und führen auch weiterhin im Ergebnis zur Erwerbsförmigkeit der Mutterrolle sowie zur Vernachlässigung nahezu aller ethischen Erwägungen zur institutionellen Erziehung und Bildung in früher Kindheit. Das Ausmaß, in dem bestimmte politische und ökonomische Programme mit den Ansprüchen von Kindern vereinbar sind, muß geprüft werden; dabei sollte diesen höchste Priorität eingeräumt werden.

This article provides a general historical overview of the emergence and development of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in post-war Britain, before focusing on the twin influences of New Labour and feminism in the promotion of various forms of ECEC as part of wider political and ideological agendas. These agendas, it is argued, have led, and continue to lead, to what in effect is the commodification of motherhood and the neglect of virtually all ethical considerations of ECEC as institutional practice. The extent to which certain political and economic agendas are ethically compatible with respect for children's entitlements needs to be examined and the latter should be given paramount consideration.

Introduction

The dominant view among the ECEC lobby (government officials, educationalists, psychologists, social policy analysts, feminist academics and activists) is that ECEC[1] is a 'good thing'. Putting young children 0-4 into daycare/nurs-

1 The British ECEC structure has been and continues to be diverse and, to a large extent, muddled. Broadly speaking, however, the services can be described as follows: I) Day Nurseries (which may be funded and run by local authorities, voluntary organizations, commercial outlets, or workplace employers) emphasize care and welfare, offer both a full and part-time provision, are staffed by trained nursery nurses, and are intended for 0-3 year olds, but may take older children up to school age. Those run by local authority social services departments are normally providing 'welfare care' and are limited to a small minority of families with problems. Probably most day care for under 3s is private. 2) Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes (in primary schools) emphasize education and generally offer part-time services to 3-4 year olds. They are normally either privately owned or funded by local education

ery school apparently enhances their social, emotional, intellectual and cognitive development so that they are not only academically and linguistically more advanced than children who are cared for at home, but are friendlier and less insecure. And, if these were not reasons enough to provide universal and comprehensive public childcare for the under 5s, such childcare provision turns out to be helpful to the government in the restructuring of the welfare state, essential for getting single mothers back into the workforce and, therefore, off welfare benefit, important for achieving the goal of social inclusion and reducing child poverty, indispensable for improving gender equity in the labour market, useful for remedying the occasional labour shortage, and, by no means least, it helps feminists in their quest to disentangle 'motherhood' from 'womanhood'. Obviously only a spoilsport, or a conservative 'family values' diehard could possibly raise objections. Yet the childcare issue continues to be controversial and emotional. Somewhere, in the midst of the cluster of adult ideological interests that so dominates ECEC, there stands the child – famously referred to in a report on child abuse as 'a person, not an object of concern' (Quoted in Daniel & Ivatts 1998, 207).

The objective of this article is to challenge the existing 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1980, 131) surrounding ECEC: 'that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.' (Foucault 1980, 131).The intention is to raise critical awareness of the ethics involved in what is described as 'commodified childcare' and to question the 'disciplinary power' (self-discipline) that works to conceal the goals of the regime (Taylor, 1986, 69). Integral to this regime is 'knowledge' (especially the social sciences), which 'not only shapes our understanding of the world' but also 'provides techniques of normalization' (Dahlberg, et al., 1999, 30).

Such regimes 'constitute boundaries' for what is seen as 'the truth' and 'the right thing to do' (Foucault, quoted in Dahlberg, et al., 1999, 31). And, of course, within the regime, there is the constant flow between 'rhetoric and reality', which can be seen as 'oiling the works' of the different elements of social practice: physical, sociological, psychological and linguistic (Fairclough 2000, 143-

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authorities, and have trained teachers and sometimes also nursery nurses to assist. 3) Playgroups, which became 'pre-school centres' in 1995, are voluntary, co-operative, or private. The children, under 3s, usually attend for half-day sessions a couple of times a week. 4) Nursery Centres are usually voluntary, but sometimes run by the local authority, and combine education and care services (and occasionally health services for both mothers and children) with flexible hours. The largest single source of 'childcare' is kin, followed by Childminders, registered and unregistered. It should be noted that that there are widespread local variations in all types of childcare provision. Historically, nursery schools have been used by the middle class, whereas day nurseries have been used by the working class, with the middle class also using playgroups to compensate for inadequate nursery provision. Furthermore, prior to New Labour, there has never been a national childcare policy; rather since 1918 responsibility has been divided between the Ministry of Health (care and welfare in day nurseries) and the Ministry of Education (education in nursery schools and classes).

45). The argument presented here is that in so far as the current perception and practice of ECEC is one such regime, it is excluding alternative ways of conceptualizing childcare in a world where it might reasonably be said that ethical principles are being eroded as altruism is demeaned in favour of Egoism – meaning self-interest as the foundation of morality. Consequently, there is an urgent need to be 'truthful'.

1. Historical overview since 1045

The coming of the second world war and the demand for women's labour brought about a huge increase in nursery provision to the extent that by 1944 there were 1,450 full-times nurseries, catering for the 0-5 age group (as opposed to 118 in 1938), 109 part-time nurseries (2-5) and 784 nursery classes. The context for wartime growth were the evacuation schemes which, in taking hundreds of thousands of children and the mothers of young children into temporary accommodation away from the bombing of large cities, created a number of social and welfare problems. For fear that many of the evacuees would up and leave their billets in reception areas, the government established Board of Education (BofE) Nursery Centres as a kind of 'rudimentary form of nursery school', the intention being to ease the strain on mothers and on those families with whom they were billeted (Ferguson & Fitzgerald 1954, 176-211). But the more fundamental reason for the expansion of childcare provision (meaning 'care' *and* 'education') was the demand for women workers, including those with young children: in 1931, 16 percent of married women were employed, whereas by 1943 the figure was 43 percent, about one third of whom had children under 14 (Summerfield 1984, 51, 62 and Riley 1983, 123).

Once the war was over, however, the nursery programme was quickly ended. Government grants were removed and responsibility for ECEC was left to local authorities who proved to be less than enthusiastic. One reason for the closure of the nurseries was the sustained criticism of their health record from the Committee of the Medical Women's Federation, which concluded that the children suffered from a 'constant and considerable increase of respiratory tract infection' (Riley 1983, 110-11). More important was the difference in outlook between the Ministry of Health (MofH), which wanted to close the nurseries, and the BofE, which looked favourably upon them (Riley 1983, 116-22). Despite the closures, the wartime schemes helped to popularise the idea of nursery school education *per se* (though not day nursery 'childcare'). This was evident in the 1943 White Paper on education, in its support for the provision of nurseries 'even when children come from good homes'. The significance of this remark is that for the first time official sanction was given to the idea of nursery 'education' for *all* children (Blackstone 1974, 63-4). As a result, the 1944 Education Act stated that local education authorities should take notice of 'the need for' nursery education.

But this had little effect on post-war provision as other claims on the authorities' education budgets took precedence. Moreover, it seems that there was no 'sustained and systematic campaigning' on the part of working women to keep the nurseries open (Summerfield 1984, 189-90; Randall 2000, 41). The general public feeling was that young children should be at home with their mothers (Lewis 1984, 152). Accordingly, the number of day nurseries fell from a high

of 1300 in 1945 to an all time low of 444 in the late 60s, and in many local authority areas there was no funded provision at all (Randall 2000, 47; Tizard et al 1974, 74-9). By and large, throughout the 1950s, the official view was that nursery places were to be provided only for children with special social, health or developmental needs.

In the years following the immediate post-war period, between 1958 and 1973, Britain witnessed numerous social, economic and cultural mutations that brought about a fundamental rethinking of societal roles and attitudes. The diversification in family formation, demographic trends, increasing consumerism, the cultural revolution, and the birth of the Women's Liberation Movement, together with liberal legislation concerning homosexuality, divorce, abortion, family planning, and the abolition of capital punishment, all served to undermine many traditional values and practices (Marwick 1990, part 2; Pugh 1994 254-328; Glennerster 1995, ch.7).

During the 1960s, two long-term developments helped to promote ECEC. First, the 'rediscovery' of poverty and the founding of the Child Poverty Action Group in 1965 and, second, urban redevelopment, which led to the disintegration of 'traditional' working-class communities and the creation of the high-rise tenament block. Both developments emphasized family isolation and deprivation, and encouraged reformers to campaign for remedial care for the children of the poor, especially the million or so living in single-parent households by 1974 (Banting 1979, Glennerster 1995; Fletcher 1966, ch.4, Gavron 1966). Nevertheless, the dominant view of childcare continued to be that early and prolonged separation from the mother was detrimental to the young child (0-2) (Tizard 1976, 86-7).

One of the most influential sources of this belief, as is well known, was John Bowlby's theory of 'maternal deprivation', with its emphasis on mother-child bonding and the desirability of the presence of the mother (or mother figure) to reassure the young child and prevent the development of an anxiety complex (Bowlby 1953; Holmes, 1993, 37-58; Kagan 1998, 93-95). Broadly speaking, these sentiments were echoed by the Plowden Report on Children and their Primary Schools (1967)[2], as it recommended reform of the education system in order to better accommodate the working class child. It is true that the Report saw nursery education as being critically important in preparing children for school, and it accepted that there was a consensus among informed observers that nursery education was good in principle, 'not only on educational grounds, but also for social, health and welfare considerations'; it also recognized that a growing number of mothers were becoming wage-earners (Plowden 1967, i, paras 296, 117 & 299:118.) However, the Report was adamant that attendance should be part-time for 3-5s, and that it was not suitable for children under 3 who should be in the care of their mothers (Plowden 1967, I, para 309:121).

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2 The Plowden Report was famous for proclaiming a 'controlled progressivism' in primary education, favouring a balance between individual and class work. However, it was perhaps most notable for the connections it made between educational success and home and social background, emphasizing that education had to be concerned with the whole family.

On the other hand, in accepting the legitimacy of nursery education and relating it to the broader issue of social disadvantage, Plowden encouraged the beginning of a determined 'under-fives lobby' (Randall 2000, 65-70; Tizard et al., 1976, 82-4).

The lobby made significant advances during the 1970s. First, campaigners understood that if ECEC were to become part of the public discourse (as opposed to being limited to academics and other professionals), it would be necessary to dislodge the influence of Bowlby (and that of D.W. Winnicott, a popular broadcaster and authoritative child analyst and paediatrician, who shared Bowlby's emphasis on the mother figure. Winnicott 1964; Riley 1983). The lobby was fortunate in being able to draw upon at least three pioneering studies (Rutter 1972, Schaffer 1977, and Tizard et al, 1976), each of which produced psychological and social evidence disputing the 'need' for continual care of young children by their mothers. And, as if to reinforce the message, the proportion of children aged 0-4 with working mothers, increased from 16 percent in 1971 to approximately 24 percent in 1976. Second, Jack Tizard, co-author of one of the studies, Professor of Child Development at London University, and a pioneering advocate of ECEC, secured funds from the Department of Health to establish the Thomas Coram Research Unit (as part of the Institute of Education at London University), which became the leading academic centre for the propagation of ECEC. The Unit, with its access to government departments, gave activists an institutional base, which was reinforced with the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission (1976, following the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975). Third, there was evidence of other institutional shifts: the Department of Health and Social Security sponsored a conference on 'low cost day-care' in 1975; the Trades Union Congress (mainly under pressure from feminists and influenced by equal opportunities legislation) set up a working party on care services for the under fives; the government's think-tank, the Central Policy Review Staff also looked at the issue; and the Associations of County Councils and Metropolitan Authorities, representing local authorities, established its own working party to examine the matter (Randall 2000, 67, 70-73).

A minority voice within the growing consensus in favour of full-time daycare for the under threes, was that of Mia Kellmer Pringle (Director of the National Children's Bureau) who, besides arguing that mothers be given more recognition for their work and financial support, raised one of the central and most bitterly controversial aspects of the daycare debate, then and now, namely that 'to bring children into the world without one parent being willing to devote at least three years to their fulltime care, should come to be regarded as a selfish indulgence.' She went on to say that children had been used as pawns in divorce cases, and were now in danger of being so used 'in the quest for economic prosperity and in the battle for women's liberation' (Quotation in Randall 2000, 68).

By the mid 1980s there was a prominent childcare lobby representing trade unionists, local authorities, the Labour Left, feminists, professionals, and academic advocates, but, despite minor so-called advances via the European Community Childcare Network (1986) and the Children Act (1989), it could make little headway with the Thatcher government, which was busy attempting to restructure both the economy and the welfare state. However, campaigners were

enthused by the 'demographic timebomb' scare that arose when employment figures released in 1988 showed that the number of school leavers would fall by a third by 1993 (Moss 1991, 139). The inference was that government and employers had to get mothers of young children back into the labour market, especially those with skills (Randall 2000, 88).

But little was achieved in the way of tangible developments as the economy went into a period of economic recession under Major's conservative government. Nevertheless, it was during these years that lone mothers came to be linked to welfare dependency and, therefore, to the childcare issue since their number was rising while the percentage in employment declined from 45 percent in 1981 to 39 percent in 1993-4 (Randall 2000, 94). Another determining factor, albeit an indirect one, was the climate of opinion in the traumatic aftermath of the murder of two-year old James Bulger, by two ten year old boys. The event crystallized a number of social and political critiques of Liberal society, not least the apparent 'innocence' of children (Jenks 1996) and, more specifically, it led researchers in the Home Office to see a link between juvenile crime and educational and social deprivation (Sylva 1991; Morgan 1996, 63-80). By 1994, after much indecision, the government moved to commit itself to providing nursery education in nursery schools, as well as reception classes and playgroups, but only for 4 year olds.

2. Cece under new Labour

On coming to power in 1997, the New Labour government began an extensive review and restructuring of all education, welfare and childcare services for young children. Since then the following developments have occurred: a National Childcare Strategy ('Meeting the Childcare Challenge', Department of Employment & Education – DfEE – Green Paper, 1998) has been designed, to be implemented by 'early years development and childcare partnerships'; educational provision is to be made available for nearly all 4 year olds; similar provision is intended for the majority of 3 year olds; the Treasury has initiated 'Sure Start' programme aimed at the under 3s in disadvantaged areas[3]; a programme of Centres of Early Excellence intended to encourage 'best practice' is under way; a Working Families Tax Credit scheme has been launched under which families below a certain wage will be given financial assistance to purchase childcare provision from the private sector; and there is a system of regulation and training for the early education, childcare and playgroup sectors (Moss 1999, 229-30; OECD 2001, 42-52).

While it is clear that there has been a great deal of activity, leading ECEC academic advocates are uneasy since 'none of these initiatives have an explicit philosophy of childhood, in the sense that they articulate a view of what children need and what kind of daily practices are necessary in order to best pro-

3 Sure Start is a programme across government departments that aims at 'promoting the physical, intellectual and social development of children from birth to 4 years, particularly those who are disadvantaged, to ensure that they are ready to thrive when they get to school'. The programme is described as being a 'key element in the government's strategy to reduce social exclusion by shifting the focus away from remediation towards prevention' (OECD, 58).

vide for children', and that rather than transform the system of ECEC, the government is merely reforming it in line with major Policy Projects, but with little thought for young children as a social group (Penn 2000, 40; Moss 1999, 230). The criticism refers to the legacy of early childhood provision in Britain, which has always been divided between 'school-based' provision (in nursery or reception classes in infant schools) and a motley collection of 'day care' or 'childcare' services, including day nurseries, playgroups, childminders, and family centres (See note 1).

In order to understand the government's attitude to children, it will be helpful to look at what is accepted as being the closest New Labour comes to having a political philosophy, namely the Third Way, described as the 'renewal of social democracy' (Giddens 1998, subtitle). Briefly, the cornerstones are 'equal opportunity, personal responsibility and the mobilization of citizens and communities' (Giddens 2000, 2). Old Labour pursued social justice with a pre-eminent stress upon equality of outcome: 'As a consequence, effort and responsibility were ignored. Social democracy became associated with a dull conformity, rather than creativity, diversity and achievement ... social benefits too often subdued enterprise as well as community spirit Rights were elevated above responsibilities, resulting in a decline in mutual obligation and support' (Giddens 2000, 6, Fairclough 2000, 21-50).

An essential characteristic of the Third Way is the emphasis placed upon Rights and Duties, which are seen as a 'feature of citizenship' and as part of a 'new social contract' (Giddens 2000, 52). Giddens suggests a new motto for the new politics: '*no rights without responsibilities*' (1998, 65. Emphasis original). The old left and social democracy in general is accused of having treated 'rights as unconditional claims', but with 'expanding individualism' there should come 'an extension of individual obligations' (1998, 65). This interpretation of rights and duties forms the bedrock for the new citizenship which, in Blair's words 'gives rights but demands obligations, shows respect but wants it back, grants opportunity, but insists on responsibility ... the purpose of economic and social policy should be to extend opportunity, to remove the underlying causes of social alienation. But it should also take tough measures to ensure that the chances that are given are taken up' (Quoted in Introduction, Savage & Atkinson (Eds), 2001, 10-11).

The location for this brand of citizenship is 'the community', a concept with a special place in the lexicon of New Labour. The focus in communitarianism, unlike Old Labour's commitment to social class, is on duties and responsibilities rather than rights, and this points to the centrality of the prescriptive and moral element. Communities are to be distinguished 'by shared moral values which are seen as a means of restoring social cohesion' (Johnson in Savage & Atkinson (Eds), 2001, 184). However, a frequent criticism of communitarianism is that it is authoritarian and rooted in 'a form of populism and governmental moralism' (Savage & Atkinson (Eds), 2001, 15; Fairclough 2000, 41-42).

The government accepts that social change has had a profound effect upon family structure and that there is an irreversible growing diversity of family forms. Nonetheless, it remains committed to promoting 'stable' family relationships and recommends dual parenting as most desirable for children. But not every-

thing is as straightforward as it seems, since New Labour is somewhat caught between what are often conflicting forces involved in: i) encouraging the growth of a fully individualized workforce, which will necessitate either public or commercial childcare provision; ii) meeting the cost of a publicly-funded childcare programme; and iii) simultaneously promoting its own version of family (parental) responsibilities and duties. This is particularly difficult, in view of the government's elevation of paid work as 'active citizenship', where there is the problem of deciding the extent to which childcare in the home justifies non-participation in the labour market. Indeed, it appears that 'the new contract for "welfare" is premised on a fully individualised worker that takes insufficient account of care' (Lewis 2001, in Seldon (Ed), 499-500; Rake 2001; Randall 2002, 219-20, 233-35). Given the central role of work – 'Work is not just about earning a living. It is a way of life' – which includes the participation of lone mothers (whose families accounted for more than 20 per cent of all families with children in the mid-1990s) so as to lift them and their children out of welfare dependency and poverty (social exclusion), while also improving national economic competitiveness, the government will be presented with some awkward choices (Quotation from Harriet Harman when Minister of Social Security, in Fairclough 2000, 57).

Where children are concerned directly, there is little doubt that New Labour has an authoritarian approach since they are now more carefully monitored and regulated than probably at any other time in the post-war period. Despite much rhetoric referring to community activism and active citizenship, the government appears 'to be working to exclude, rather than include, children as citizens' in school, home, and community (James & James 2001, 212; Wyness 2000, 30-53). Schools in particular have become more structured along disciplinary lines: the national curriculum, league tables, testing, dress codes, new attendance regulations, behaviour contracts, greater emphasis on taught basic subjects to the exclusion of the arts and popular subjects – all this constitutes a disciplinary regime for children (and for those parents who are regarded as 'inadequate' and those teachers who might be tempted to retain the 'old' child-centred, progressive teaching methods). With respect to crime prevention, schools are seen as playing a critical role since they teach children 'how to use information, obey rules and learn the link between effort and reward' (Audit Commission, 1998, quoted in James & James 2001, 217). Furthermore, children are being made subject to curfew orders and 'fast track' courts, and there are plans to put the children of 'nightmare neighbours', who have been evicted from their council housing estates, into the care of social services. The government also opposes any move to prohibit parental corporal punishment of children.

New Labour appears to share the view of the media and conservative commentators that there is a 'crisis' of childhood, that young people are out of control, that children need responsibilities rather than rights, and that they are not fit to participate as active citizens in civil society (Scraton 1997; Freeman 2000; Prout 2000; James & James 2001, 214). The widespread view of professional and charitable agencies working with children, that they have rights and are a distinct social group with their own culture and standpoints, as well as being agents in the construction of their and others' social worlds, is missing in New Labour's approach. The government's objective, with children slotted

in as 'human capital', is nothing less than the reshaping of childhood, especially that of the poor and the inadequate; consequently, the socialization of young children is critically important.

All the government's plans, whether they are social or economic, in one way or another involve education – hence the key slogan: 'Education, education, education' – it is the lynchpin of the long-term programme to promote economic competitiveness, and to provide the socially excluded with 'equal opportunities' (and skills) in order to bring them within civil society (Giddens 1998, 78-86 & 2000; Levitas 1999, Kendall 2001, 154). The danger, as New Labour sees it, is that social exclusion threatens both economic growth and political stability and, therefore, 'social inclusion' is a major policy priority. But the broader interest is that of 'life-long education', as a disciplinary measure encompassing far more than skills training. According to Giddens (allegedly Blair's 'favourite intellectual'), governments need to develop education programmes 'that start from an individual's early years and continue on even later in life. Although training in specific skills may be necessary for many job transitions, *more important is the development of cognitive and emotional competence*' (1998, 125. Emphasis added). Clearly, the reshaping of childhood is part of the larger project of reshaping future adulthood (James & James 1991, 215).

In many respects New Labour appears to accept the doctrine of 'infant determinism', namely that the first three years of life 'are formative in determining subsequent development and achievement' (OECD 2001, 42), despite a number of scientific criticisms made of putting undue emphasis on 0-3 as a 'critical period' (Kagan 1998; Bruer 1999). The belief is that these years can be spent preparing children for full-time schooling, while simultaneously adjusting them (and, where necessary, their parents) to an ordered social environment. This explains the 'Sure Start' programme (see note 4). Similarly, the purpose of organized childcare is to secure 'better outcomes for children', meaning 'readiness to learn by the time they reach school and enjoyable, developmental activities out of school hours; and more parents with the chance to take up work education or training' (DfEE, 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge' 1998: para.1.29). No wonder that even a leading advocate of ECEC observes that the intention seems to be 'to embody the construction of the young child as an empty vessel needing to be "ready made" to learn for school and as a supply side factor in determining the labour force' (Moss 1999, 235).

3. Feminism

Of all the inputs into the debate on ECEC, feminism appears to have received the least attention, though in many respects it has been a major contributor to the current 'regime of truth'. There are many varieties of feminism and a brief account risks oversimplifying complex and often conflicting perspectives. Nevertheless, in view of the wealth of feminist writings on 'the family' and 'motherhood' and the numerous national campaigns for state provided childcare services, it is important that ECEC be seen not simply in relation to government economic and social strategies, but also as a feature of a global feminist strategy to recast our beliefs about these matters. Thus, divorcing women from so-called 'socially constructed' motherhood is regarded as crucial where matters of biology (opposing the view that 'biology is destiny), caring (women as unpaid,

allegedly sacrificial non-persons being denied their own identity), and economic dependency (of women on men) are concerned.

The generally negative view of motherhood and the family that so characterized the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s and 1980s has become far less strident during the last twenty years, though much of the re-thinking has been 'pro-woman' rather than pro-child (Rich 1977, Ruddick 1980, Segal 1987). Motherhood continues to be seen as oppressive, but 'at the same time it can be one in which women can experience autonomy and wholeness' (Anne Oakley, quoted in Randall 1996, 499) or, put another way, having children can be 'a restorative, healing experience; it can bring a new kind of freedom or confidence based on a grounded identity, a sense of connectedness' (Randall 1996, 499). None of this points to a concern for the paramountcy of either the child's welfare or its happiness.

Perhaps the most common argument for universal, full-time childcare provision is that mothers want it in order to be free to enter paid employment. More women, it is claimed, would enter both the full and part-time labour market if there were greater availability of childcare services. And yet the recent Labour Force Survey data report shows that 90 per cent of part-time female workers with children do not want to work full time (Cited in Lewis 2001, 500). Moreover, a forceful counter argument has been made to the effect that though there is a group of women who do want career jobs, there is also a group that do not and who give priority to their marriage, husbands, and children. (Hakim 1995. See reply from Jay Ginn et al., 1996). Indeed, the same author alleges that there are 'feminist myths' surrounding women's employment, and that there is a bias in much of feminist social scientific research on this subject – that what is in fact advocacy writing is presented as academic research (Hakim 1999). The childcare lobby, it is said, is 'driven from the top by articulate, highly-educated women who form a minority but benefit from these policies' (Dex quoted in Randall 2000, 121). Even feminist academic advocates of comprehensive childcare provision are compelled to acknowledge that 'the messages we receive from mothers of young children both about work and about childcare are quite complex and ambiguous' (Randall 2000, 121).

The feminist campaign for universal childcare has tended to focus on working within other groups and organizations in order to advance their agenda. Of particular importance have been trades unions, local authorities, national child welfare charities, and those professional bodies advocating ECEC in terms of social, emotional and cognitive development, and educational advancement (Randall 2002, 231). An equally effective strategy has been the extension of feminist influence within the Labour party, certainly after the election defeat of 1987 when it was realized that Labour needed to become more 'women friendly' (Randall 2000, 129).

But feminists have not always been completely honest either in their campaign strategies or their declared objectives. The hidden nature of the feminist enterprise is revealed by Sonya Michel, a prominent American feminist welfare historian. Feminists, she writes, who are seeking to '*transform* (emphasis added) the way in which young children are reared' can do 'more good if they remain in the shadows while other social actors lobby for child care on behalf of interests that are not explicitly feminist ... The terms of such allian-

ces may require feminists to cloak their own support for child care in the rhetoric of another interest group'. Consequently, 'child care advocates have most frequently made common cause with early childhood educators, whose goals tend to appear more benign to wary publics ... *educators have helped overcome objections to placing small children in childcare by emphasizing the social, emotional, and cognitive benefits of group situations'* (Michel in Michel & Mahon. Eds. 2002, 333-4. Emphasis added). Clearly, it looks as if feminism has been duplicitous in its public stance; perhaps it has even deceived those mothers (members of the 'wary publics') who reluctantly put their children into childcare in the mistaken belief that it must be good for them, whereas the feminist objective is not primarily concern with the welfare of young children, but the promotion of 'appropriate child care policies' in order to 'progress toward greater equality between the sexes' (Mahon in Michel & Mahon. Eds. 2002:3).

4. Commodification of Childcare

Where young children are involved, New Labour, feminists, and the rest of the ECEC lobby appear to be seeking to redefine significant aspects of maternal childcare through an extension of the commercialisation of 'caring' (The criticism made here is not to commercialisation as such, but to the degree). In place of the 'traditional' view that mothers (and fathers) have primary and obligatory (even 'sacrificial') responsibilities for their young children, a system of professionalized and paid ECEC is being advocated as preferable. In effect, there is a decided drift along the road towards a commodification of the fundamental bond of intimacy between mothers and their young children.

The process of commodification is occurring in three respects. First, by transforming a set of 'natural' (meaning mother-child) attitudes and behaviour patterns into economic acts, 'mothering' (and fathering), in its essence as 'nurture', is made available to be *purchased,* through an institutional structure, in the marketplace from trained 'professionals'. Consequently, the specifically unique individual mother/child relationship is not only commodified, but also made universal in the sense that *any* professional can do it with *any* child. Thus 'mothering' is reduced to being simply another paid 'caring' practice.

In order to understand this process, it is necessary to consider 'de-familialization', meaning 'the degree to which households' welfare and caring responsibilities are relaxed – either via welfare state provision, or via market provision'; in other words de-familiarization 'seeks to unburden the household and diminish individuals' welfare dependence on kinship' (Esping-Andersen 1999, 51). The relaxing of these 'responsibilities' is 'generally a precondition for women to "commodify themselves" ' (Orloff quoted in E-A, 51). In fact, it seems that social policies and market mechanisms 'render women autonomous to become "commodifed"' (Esping-Andersen 1999, 51). If this is so, then it is hard to see how mothers of young children can commodify themselves without also commodifying their caring responsibilities to an undesirable extent? Aside from this particular ethical consideration, mothers' involvement in the childcare *market* might also be seen as raising the issue of their (and our) duty (obligation) towards children, as under New Labour the market seems to assume a kind of governing moral status in relation to citizenship (Giddens, 2000, 164-

5). Perhaps three (confusing) sets of moral activism are overlapping here: maternal, market, and civil society?

The second respect whereby commodification occurs is that young children, as *people*, are commodified: they are reconfigured as *objects* in that their care becomes an examinable subject in a training programme for adult employees: the care they received from their mothers for 'free', as the defining feature of a fundamental emotional attachment, now attains a marketable price – so children (people) are turned into 'childwork' in the sense of 'being the object of others' labour' (Oldman 1994, 155. Only paid labour is the concern here). The child, then, is both 'labour' and, when the caring task is completed, finished product. Looked at in this light, it may well be that this particular relationship between sets of adults and young children is exploitative? (Oldman 1994, 155 and 161-66). The professional childcare structure through which ECEC operates (even if it is accepted that it assists the growth and development of young children) can hardly be said to have child welfare as its *primary or motivational* function. For whatever benefits may accrue to children, they are surely secondary to those enjoyed by adults (Oldman 1994, 158, Daniel & Ivatts 1998, 149 & 166), particularly with respect to government policies on education and the labour market? Notwithstanding this argument, however, the caring that originates in a unique and individualized bond between infant and mother is turned into little more than an economic relationship, referred to in ECEC literature as 'high quality, *affordable* childcare' (emphasis added).

The reference above to New Labour and the market reminds us that commodification can also be considered from the perspective of government economic strategy in which young children are constructed as '*a labour market supply factor* which must be addressed to ensure an adequate labour supply and the efficient use of resources' (Dahlberg et al., 1999, 47. Emphasis original). Unsurprisingly, New Labour's 'welfare to work' programme depends on creating a new relationship between social security, the family and labour market participation (Hill 2001, 198. At present, lone mothers with pre-school children are not subject to compulsion). And central to 'welfare to work' is the significance of work as a social good in civil society, and attention has already been drawn above to the tension between the wish to create 'fully individualised' paid workers and the various 'caring' roles of women in the family (Hill 2001, 199; Lewis 2001; Raike 2001). Where childcare is involved, the government is implicitly, if not explicitly, encouraging the re-ordering of maternal care. This must be the logical outcome of the strategy since the moral weight that has been put behind 'welfare to work' elevates paid employment and seems to prioritize the marketplace in opposition to the home.

The third consideration is the role and value of 'the emotions' in the process of commodification. If it is accepted that emotions are expressions of humanity, that they define us as human and that they a 'a fundamental mode of being' (Lupton 1998; 88; Denzin 1984, x, Fruend 1990, 458), then it follows that the early emotional relationship between young child and mother is of critical social, moral and developmental significance. The emotions between mother and child are produced through a series of individually unique situations: pregnancy as a defining condition, foetal growth in the womb, the birth process, breast feeding, and washing and cleaning of the infant. These situations have been

termed 'experiences', which are not solely the product of socialization, but arise from biological differences between women and men (Whitbeck 1983, 186, Chodorow 1978). The emotional 'attachment' that young children have to their mothers (and vice versa) is not one that can be lightly transferred to a professional carer. The apparent fact that young children can have successful emotional relationships with more than one carer is beside the point since the unique and original attachment is to the mother and, therefore, of special importance.

The emotional aspects of the consequences of commodification are ignored by ECEC advocates in so far the child's basic emotions such as happiness and anger expressed through laughter, tears and aggression, tend to be viewed as 'childish' behaviour of little or no consequence. The dismissal of the child's emotions arises from the fact that since emotions are always connected to time, place and authority, then they emanate from specific contexts and are 'allowed' by virtue of what has been called an 'emotional dictionary' – a 'giant cultural entity', which always reflects agreement among authorities on what is acceptable (Hochschild 1979, 1993, 1998; Hendrick 2002). It hardly needs stating that children's emotions, seen as either culturally legitimate or as expressed via their 'interests' in current legal case-law, have great difficulty in finding a place in the 'dictionary' (Herring 1999).

5. Ethical Considerations

We cannot avoid being involved in ethics: 'for what we do – and what we don't do – is always a possible subject of ethical evaluation' (Singer (Ed.) 2000, v). Thus we need to ask if there are any unfavourable ethical difficulties with universal programmes of ECEC? The usual justification for ECEC is in terms of children's 'needs' for social and cognitive development which, so it is said, can be met by appropriate childcare services. But 'needs', both as basic essentials and as contextually and culturally determined, are remarkably difficult to identify with any certainty and are the subject of controversy among psychologists and other researchers (Woodhead 1997, Hill & Tidsall 1997; Leach 1994, 83-92). Notwithstanding the controversy, 'needs' stand in relation to ethics in so far as, together with Rights, they 'entail an implication of an obligation to respond'. Moreover, this obligation is primarily ethical since unlike rights, which 'are based on moral or legal status, needs are derived from human characteristics perceived to be inherent to individuals or everyone' (Hill & Tidsall 1997, 39).

One of the most universally accepted needs is for human attachment. And while attachment theory (associated with Bowlby) has been refined in many respects since the 1960s (Rutter 1981; Holmes 1993), it remains central to the concept of need in children for what is not in dispute is that young children 'not only have a primary need for intimacy, but indeed a propensity to form close, loving relationships with responsive people in their lives' (Hill & Tidsall 1997, 44; Leach 1994, 79-92). The current consensus among child psychologists that the mother figure does not have to be the natural mother, and that the young child can cope with more than one carer in 'good quality' caring environments is being exploited by the childcare lobby for its own ends, despite the acknowledged difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of non-family carers in any-

thing other than isolated and small-scale surveys (many of which focus on nurseries of atypical high quality). Furthermore, the reliability of the research findings is the subject of considerable debate among professionals (Morgan 1996, Leach 1994, Hughes et al., 1980, Randall 2000).

Leaving aside all the qualifications regarding ECEC provision, the parental relationship involves more than a commitment to 'quicken up' certain features of a child's social and cognitive development, it also requires moral notions of the natural and the desirable and of what is a legitimate entitlement on the part of the child. Meeting entitlements in this relationship demands *a degree* of self-sacrifice: a willingness in fundamental respects to subordinate one's own interests to those of the child for, say, the first two to three years. The danger is that the special relationship between mother and child – 'an independent superior and a dependent subordinate' (Archard 1993, 124) – born of the birth process, and which is of inestimable emotional value, is in danger of being degraded. The significance of the 'intimacy' between mothers and young children is that it promotes what in another context has been described as 'honesty, caring, loyalty, self-knowledge, patience, empathy', and these are 'significant moral values' (Lafollette 1999, 328). Moreover, the intensity of the bond is a feature of identity in that the individual child is wanted for who it is, because of its specific personality traits: 'When someone loves you it makes you feel better about yourself; they have *chosen* to love you because of who you are' (Lafollette 1999, 329).

How, then, might a more substantial element of ethics be introduced into ECEC? There are two related approaches. First, in opposition to the usual emphasis upon children's rights, the philosophical case for the concept of Obligation has been put by Onora O'Neill, who is particularly concerned with young children and who (in a complex argument that is that is radically compressed here) claims that rights-based approaches have not proved to be particularly helpful in dealing with all the ethical issues that arise in our dealings with children. O'Neill argues that children's fundamental rights (moral, natural, human) are best secured by 'embedding' them in 'fundamental obligation' (O'Neill 1992, 24-5). The reason being that young children have difficulty in claming rights since they lack the independence to make the claim; they are 'completely and unavoidably dependent on those who have power over their lives' (O'Neill 1992, 38). Thus, she says, child's rights campaigners are forced to address, not children themselves, but those whose actions affect children and, therefore, 'they have reason to prefer the rhetoric of obligations ... both because its scope is wider and because it addresses the relevant audience more directly' (O'Neill 1992, 39). The relevance of O'Neill's proposition is that, within the framework of paternalism, it compels us to pay close attention to our day-to-day dealings with young children during which we are obligated.

'To take full account of the ways in which children's lives are particularly vulnerable to unkindness, to lack of involvement, cheerfulness or good feeling. Their lack may be invisible from the perspective of rights. This may not seem significant if we think only of children in danger but is vital if our concern is the quality of the lives children lead. Cold, distant or fanatical parents and teachers, even if they violate no rights, deny children "the genial play of life": they can wither children's lives' (O'Neill 1992, 28).

The second approach also involves obligations. As several advocates of ECEC have recognized, postmodernity has changed the nature of personal responsibility so that it is now 'morality's last hold and hope' (Bauman, 1993, 34, quoted in Dahlberg, et al., 1999, 38). The central feature of contemporary morality is seen to be responsibility for the Other: 'we are faced with the challenge of the Other, which is the challenge of responsibility for the Other' (Bauman, 1993, 1, quoted in Dahlberg, et al, 1999, 38-9). With regard to the care of young children, the emphasis needs to be placed 'on obligation to the Other, without expectation of recompense or exchange' (Dahlberg, et al., 1999, 39):

Moral stance begets an essentially unequal relationship; thus inequality, non-equity, this not-asking-for-reciprocation, this disinterest in mutuality, this indifference to the 'balancing up' of gains or rewards ... this organically 'unbalanced' and hence non-reversible character of 'I versus the Other' relationship is what makes the encounter a moral event' (Bauman 1993, 48-9 quoted in Dahlberg, et al., 39).

Such a 'moral event' constitutes the essence of the mother-child relationship, and clearly involves not only 'the challenge of responsibility for the Other', but what is implicit in this challenge, namely sacrifice. Furthermore, it is not the mother (or parents) alone who carries this responsibility since, in the broad sense, the obligation rests with society (New Labour's civil society), which should attend to the 'genial play' of young children's lives.

But all this talk of ethics has little place in the current discussion of ECEC that for the most part prefers to focus on technical matters, and ignores critical questions. The ECEC juggernaut appears to be unstoppable both in respect of government encouragement and provision and with the growth of private sector services. This particular area of social policy is stamping its imprint upon our perception of childhood as structure and our relationships with children as people. For there should be no doubt that ECEC is writing a page in the history of childhood in so far as that history, and that of social policy, are inseparable. This is especially so where New Labour deliberately interrelates policies on the family, employment, education, and social inclusion, all of which are bound together with the rhetoric of communitarianism (which regularly portrays children as the spoilers of apparently idyllic communities). Children are central to New Labour strategies as a flexible resource component in the policy arena – they are, so to speak, both literal and metaphorical figures in a grand (adult) design.

Nowadays, we have the time, the money, and the space to follow more individualistic and probably also more selfish pursuits, so much so that children are presented as obstacles to the unspoken goal: the narcissistic self which, in so far as it 'prevents the individual from establishing valid boundaries between self and external worlds' (Giddens 1991, 170-179), may be said to diffuse sense of obligation, undermine trust, and reduce intimacy overwhelmingly in the pursuit of personal satisfaction. Of course, we still need the presence of children in our dramas of anxiety, if only as reassurance that there is a future, but in their place. Perhaps we are on the point of deciding that only when children are specifically and conveniently located, corralled maybe the appropriate word, can *we* be free to maximize choice in all its postmodern chaos. Could it be that in the neurotic scramble to fashion (and refashion) our own pleasing identities, we are denying young children theirs?

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